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PEOPLE OF THE SALT WATER
CHANNEL

The Natural History of
Annette Island, Alaska

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There are many different kinds of homes throughout the world. One person's back yard may be another person's desert. A bird might nest or a plant might grow where no person dares to venture. Annette Island's wet forests surely look uncomfortable to a child from The African savanna.

But no matter how different our home environments may seem, they all have certain things in common. Every home on the face of our Earth is influenced by the sun, the rain, and the wind. These natural forces crumble rocks into soil so plants can grow and animals can live.

All environments are the result of different combinations of the same ingredients. These ingredients, our natural resources, are at the root of human survival. Not only do we need them, but they need each other. The sun, water, rocks, soil, plants, and animals-all these ingredients, in some way, are related to each other.

For centuries, native peoples have understood this inter-relationship of all things. The Northwest Coast tribes praised the forces that gave them rich forests and bountiful waters. They hunted only for food and never wasted any part of an animal. The people appreciated all that the Great Natural had provided and lived in harmony with their environment.

As time passed, their lifestyles changed. Progress and modern ways threaten to disturb this harmony. Land has been cleared, but not replanted. Industry has created new products, but polluted the water and air. Plant sprays have poisoned not only insects, but also the birds and mammals that feed upon the plants. And animals that took millions of years to evolve have been hunted to extinction.

Sometimes our human wants exceed our natural resources.

Alaska is one of our last wilderness areas. Its natural resources are vast--the abundant forests, rugged mountains, and clear waters seem endless. But unless we conserve these resources, the wealth will someday run out. The Northwest Coast Indians realized this. They knew that wise use of their resources meant a plentiful life for their children and grandchildren. In some of Earth's homes, however, this understanding has been forgotten.

Today our lifestyles often separate us from our resources. We buy food in a grocery store, order clothes from a catalogue, and buy wood from a lumberyard. With our needs so readily met, it is "easy to forget how dependent we are upon our natural resources. It is not too late, however, to learn what the Northwest Coast Indians have always known. When we understand our natural world we begin to appreciate it and want to preserve it for our children.

The Tsimshian Indians are very fortunate to live in such a rich, productive environment. If the natural resources are used wisely, they will always be here. Let us explore Annette Island and discover its treasure of resources...